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ABSTRACT

This study examines the messages presented by fictional characters during the family hour, later prime time, and Saturday morning television in the 1975-76 season. Demographic variables of program attributes include type of program--family or medical drama, situation comedy, or action-crime; attributes investigated for the fictional characters include sex, age, national origin, accent, ethnic identity, socio-economic status, occupation, program role of the character, and minority characteristics. Findings of the study are presented and discussed, together with some of their implications. A list of references is provided. (RAO)

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The Demography of Fictional Television Characters in 1975-76

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PRIOR CASTLE REPORTS

REPORT NO. 1: Bradley S. Greenberg, Charles K. Atkin, Nadyne G. Edison, and Felipe Korzenny with Gary R. Heald and Jacob J. Wakshlag. "Pro-Social and Anti-Social Behavior on Commercial Television," February, 1977.

THE DEMOGRAPHY OF FICTIONAL TELEVISION CHARACTERS IN 1975-76

What picture of the adult world has been available to children from television? Research reviewed and reported in this paper indicates that television characters are systematically different from their counterparts in the general population. Prior researchers investigating characteristics as varied as minority roles, occupations, sex roles, age, and social status have verified differential representation for several of these demographic attributes.

For example, ethnic and racial minority characters have been more likely to appear in specialized situations on television, although their sheer incidence approaches their proportion in the general population. In 1969, Clark reported from his analysis of TV programming that "all black characters had some connection with maintenance of law and order." Dominick and Greenberg (1970) reported an increase in minority roles on programs over three seasons, but a relatively small proportion of black characters when compared to the proportion in the population. Seggar and Wheeler (1973) reported that minority roles were over-represented in lower status positions and in brief appearances of less than three minutes. In a study of television violence, Gerbner et al. (1976) reported proportions of non-white major characters that ranged from 23% (in 1967-68) to 5% (in 1971), with a trend approaching 13% over the eight-year study (p. 86). This proportion may be slightly inflated because it represents only major characters.

Occupations have been portrayed in stereotyped ways on television: DeFleur (1964) reported that the occupational world presented on television

during hours likely to be viewed by children was far from reality. When compared to the labor force where the study was conducted, "higher status occupations were over-represented in the labor force, [and] women were under represented" in the labor force. Seggar and Wheeler (1973) reported an over-representation of high prestige occupations, gross under-representation of females in all occupations, and over-representation of protective and security services provided by males. Similar results were found by McArthur and Resko (1976).

The portrayal of sex roles on television also differs from the roles men and women play in everyday life. While women comprise slightly more than half the general population, they represent a much smaller proportion of the population of television characters on prime-time television. Studies in the early 1950's by Smythe (1954) and Head (1954) reported up to twice as many men as women. Gerbner et al. (1976) reported that women comprise less than one fourth (23%) of all major characters (p. 68). Although females had a slightly higher proportion of major roles in non-cartoon formats (27%), they had a much smaller proportion of roles in cartoons (14%) (p. 69-70). Levinson (1973), Long and Simon (1974), and McArthur and Resko (1976) further document the disproportionate frequency of males on television.

The roles played by female characters generally have been younger than their male counterparts, well-groomed, and physically attractive (Smythe 1954; Head, 1954; Gerbner and Gross, 1976; Long and Simon, 1974; Tedesco, 1974; Busby, 1975). Female roles have had a more limited scope than male roles e.g., Levinson (1973) and Long and Simon (1974) reported

that women's statuses were primarily defined in terms of their relationships to males. McArthur and Resko (1976) determined that women's roles in television commercials were as consumers, while males held roles as authorities, even for products primarily used by women.

Extremes of age and social class are rare on television. Both males and females more likely play roles as adults at the peak of sexual attractiveness (Smythe, 1954). Gerbner et al. (1976) reported that almost three-quarters of all major characters in their eight-year study appeared in roles with social ages as young adult or settled adult, while approximately 10% of major characters were children or adolescents, and only 3-4% of major characters were "old." Social class was also concentrated in a middle range: 86% of major characters were in the middle social class, while 10% were in the upper class, and only slightly more than 3% were lower class (p. 80).

The major trends from studies of television programming and commercials support the same conclusions, despite differences in programs sampled, time frames sampled, and different coding schemes across a wide span of television years. The characterizations show the important people on television as predominantly male, white, unmarried, middle class, and in an age range from 20-40 years.

So why another study of similar characteristics? First, few studies have done a comprehensive analysis of major demographic characteristics. They typically choose this characteristic or that, but not a broad set. By concurrently analyzing a fuller range of such characteristics, it is possible to look for interactions among the characteristics. Second, the

networks and their lobbying groups purport to be making significant efforts in their portrayals of women, of minorities, of the aged, etc. Verification of these claims is possible using recent data, comprehensively collected. Third, it is useful to be able to examine trends, however meager their comparisons to prior data may be.

Still further, why be concerned with whether television's portrayals are realistic or representative? Is it somehow 'wrong' if they are not? That value question is not the present basis for justifying the study data, although it is legitimate in other contexts. What is important is that the present research program is concerned with what kinds of role impressions children derive from television content. If there is a conspicuous absence of one race, or the conspicuous presence of one sex in occupational groupings, or the regular subjugation of some group by social class, then the implication is that children may develop values and beliefs about such groups that are consonant with the TV portrayals. As a prerequisite for determining whether such learning and acceptance of TV's messages occur among children, it is imperative to document exactly what those messages are that can be learned. The present study addresses the specific issue of what messages TV provides about the fictional characters on its programs in terms of their demographic composition. Ongoing parallel analyses are examining such social behaviors as altruism, aggression, family modes of interaction and the behaviors of one sex toward another. Field studies designed to link the content of television to the beliefs and behaviors of young viewers are the next step from these descriptive analyses. That step is now in process, as well.

METHODS

A composite week of national network television shows during family hour (8-9 p.m.), later prime time (9-11 p.m.), and Saturday morning (8 a.m. -12:30 p.m.) was constructed in Fall, 1975. One episode of each regular series shown during those hours was videotaped. In addition, midseason replacement shows were included in the analysis for a total of 96 shows. Specials, sports events, variety shows, and network movies were excluded from the analysis. Results reported in this analysis are based on one episode of each show.

Demographic Variables

Demographic variables included two classes of information: (1) characteristics of an entire program, and (2) characteristics of individual characters.

Program Attributes

Each show was classified according to type of program (family drama, medical drama, stiuation comedy, and action-crime). Saturday morning shows were divided into "cartoon" shows and "non-cartoon" shows.

A family drama was a show primarily concerned with a serious presentation of problems within the context of a family, e.g., "Beacon Hill," "The Waltons," or "Little House on the Prairie." Medical dramas presented non-comic problems surrounding a hospital or medical setting, e.g., "Doctor's Hospital," "Medical Story," or "Emergency." Situation

comedies appeared in a variety of settings (home, office, hospital), but were primarily designed to be humorous, e.g., "Sanford and Son," "Maude," or "M*A*S*H." Action/crime shows were concerned with law enforcement by public (police) or private agencies, e.g., "Kojak," "Starsky and Hutch," or "The Rockford Files." Saturday morning shows were subdivided into Saturday cartoons, e.g., "Pink Panther," "Scooby Doo," and "Bugs Bunny," and Saturday non-cartoon shows, e.g., "Shazam/Isis," and "Uncle Croc's Block."

Character Attributes

Each speaking character was identified in the demographic analysis. Coders specified two kinds of information: first, background attributes of the character such as age, gender, occupation, and socio-economic status; and second, the kind of role played by the character, e.g., regular or guest, major or minor.

Background Characteristics. The coders identified each speaking character by name or by description, in order of speaking appearance on the show. Gender was specified and the character's age in years was estimated to the nearest full year.

Characters were identified by national origin if any evidence was provided during the show. Countries or areas specifically identified included the United States, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Arabic countries, African countries, India, Pakistan, Russia, China, other Asian countries, Australia, Canada, Mexico, and Latin (Central and South) America. For characters shown of United States origin, regional accent and ethnic identity were coded. Accent categories included New England,

New York City, Mid-Atlantic, Southern, Texan, West Coast, and Midwest/ not otherwise identified. Ethnic identity for United States characters was coded as American Indian, Asian, Black, Italian, Jewish, Polish, Scandinavian, Spanish, and Other White.

Social class or socio-economic status of a character was coded in one of five categories: poor, working, lower middle, upper middle, and aristocratic. The social class of characters was coded within the cultural setting of the show to make comparisons among shows more meaningful. For example, many of the characters on the "Waltons" would be classified as "poor" by present standards of income and affluence. They were classified in terms of the standards prevailing in the setting of the show, as "working." "Sanford and Son" is set in the contemporary United States. Its characters were coded according to conventions prevailing in the contemporary United States. "Sara" was set in the latter part of the 19th century United States, providing a different setting for judging social status. Program cues about relative social and economic status in other settings were used to make judgments.

Occupation was written on coding forms as specifically as possible. After all shows were coded, occupations were assigned numerical codes developed from the United States Census Codes by the Institute for Social Research (Robinson, Athanasiou, and Head, 1969). The occupation codes are organized into 13 major classifications, ranging from "professional, technical and related workers," to "laborers." An additional category was added to account for the large number of characters whose only occupation in a show was judged to be outside the law, e.g., prostitute, bandit, or robber.

Program Role. The kind of role played by a character was judged in four categories. First, the character's role was identified as a regular or a guest role. The importance of the role for the story was coded as major, medium, or minor. A major role was central to the story, a minor role was incidental to the story, and a medium role fell between the two extremes in importance. Roles were identified as human, humanized non-humans (anthropomorphic), or non-human (e.g., animate filing cabinet, space blob).

Minority Character Analysis. In addition to the analyses described above, a special sub-analysis was conducted for minority black and Spanish-American characters. The 96 shows were screened to identify all minority characters who had any speaking part. For each speaking character, all verbal references to race and the racial composition of the conversants were coded. Special attention was paid to the kind of accent used by the minority characters, and use of slang in speech. It was also determined if minority characters exhibited differences in dress or appearance.

Coder Training

Six undergraduate students participated in demographic content analysis. During an initial session, teams of two coders were introduced to the project, its scope, and purposes. The discussion included a general introduction to content analysis, the various aspects of content to be coded and the particular importance of the demographic analysis. When general questions were answered, training turned to discussion of the variables and coding categories. Supervised training was provided for

each team during a two-hour practice coding session. Each coder's responses were discussed and further explanation of coding categories was provided. When coders had completed the practice session, they independently viewed and coded the same set of shows until intercoder reliabilities reached .80 for all categories. When coders reached this level of reliability, shows were viewed by a single coder. Periodically, coders were instructed to code the same show to provide a reliability check.

RESULTS

This section will provide the basic findings of the demographic analysis. First, we will indicate the marginal distribution of the characters on each of the coded variables. Second, we will provide selected cross-tabulations between gender, socio-economic status and ethnicity with other key demographic characteristics, to provide a more insightful description of the attributes.

Background Characteristics. The background information enabled the following findings (see Table 1):

(1) Across 1,212 fictional characters from all prime time weekly television and Saturday morning shows, males constituted 73% of the characters, females 26% and 1% of characters could not be coded for gender.

(2) 90% of all characters were apparently United States citizens; 2% were from Western Europe, 2% were from the rest of the globe, and 5% had an indeterminate national origin.

(3) Among those whose origin was the United States, 75% were

Caucasians of no particular ethnic identity, 9% were black, 2% had Spanish surnames, and 2% were Asian. Some identifiable regional accent was used by 28% of United States characters, while 60% had no identifiable accent.

(4) Most television characters were portrayed as middle class. Of all the characters, 32% were lower class, 44% were middle class, and 17% were upper class.

(5) The average age of a television character was 37 years old. Less than 4% of all TV characters were pre-teens, 7% were in their teens, 16% were in their 50's or early 60's, and 3% were 65 or older.

(6) Over all characters, including children, the highest proportion of characters had no codeable occupation. Among those who did, professional and technical occupations made up 22%, and service workers were the next highest category 16%, reflecting the relatively large number of police officers among television characters. Slightly more than 7% of characters had occupations primarily outside the law. In later analyses, characters under age 19 were excluded from occupation classification.

Program Role Types. Of the 1,200 plus characters coded in this analysis, 41% had regular continuing roles in the weekly programs. Thus the majority of people appearing on any particular program were coded as guest appearances.

About one third of all the characters were coded as having major roles, defined as essential to the plot of the story. One half of the characters had minor roles in which they did some speaking or some action but were not essential. The remainder were coded as portraying a role of intermediate import.

Table 1.: Background Characteristics and Program Roles of Fictional Television Characters in Different Program Types

	PROGRAM TYPE						
Background Characteristics	Family Drama (n=101)	Medical Drama (n=100)	Situation Comedy (n=242)	Action Crime (n=492)	Saturday Non-Cartoon (n=50)	Saturday Cartoon (n=227)	Total* (n=1212)
Gender							
Female	32.7	39.0	36.0	22.4	22.0	15.9	26.0
Male	67.3	61.0	64.0	77.6	76.0	77.5	72.6
Does Not Apply					2.0	6.6	1.3
Age							
0-12	13.9	2.0	2.9	.8	8.0	4.0	3.3
13-19	16.8	4.0	8.7	2.2	20.0	9.7	7.0
20-34	18.8	38.0	33.9	33.6	10.0	13.2	28.0
35-49	30.7	36.0	33.5	40.1	28.0	25.6	34.4
50-64	16.8	17.0	14.5	20.2	14.0	7.0	15.8
65-86	3.0	3.0	6.6	3.0	4.0	.9	3.4
Does Not Apply				.1	16.0	39.6	8.2
National Origin							
United States	84.2	99.0	93.8	99.4	82.0	68.3	90.4
Foreign	14.9	1.0	6.2	.4		7.5	4.1
Not Codeable	1.0			.2	18.0	24.2	5.4
Regional Accent							
Some accent	25.7	46.0	29.3	31.3	8.0	14.1	27.4
Midwest or Not Identifiable	58.4	53.0	64.9	67.5	74.0	41.0	60.4
Does Not Apply	15.8	1.0	5.8	1.2	18.0	44.9	12.2
Socio-economic Status							
Lower	46.5	19.0	30.2	36.2	18.0	26.0	31.9
Middle	40.6	51.0	53.3	44.1	36.0	37.0	44.5
Upper	12.9	30.0	13.6	19.5	16.0	10.6	16.8
Cannot be Coded			2.9	.2	30.0	26.4	6.8

Table 1, continued

	PROGRAM TYPE						
	Family Drama (n=101)	Medical Drama (n=100)	Situation Comedy (n=242)	Action Crime (n=492)	Saturday Non-Cartoon (n=50)	Saturday Cartoon (n=227)	Total (n=1212)
Ethnic Identification							
American Indian	--	--	--	.4	--	--	.2
Asian Descent	3.0	2.0	.8	1.8	8.0	--	1.6
Black	6.9	4.0	15.7	8.5	2.0	6.6	8.8
Italian	--	1.0	5.0	1.6	--	--	1.7
Jewish	--	5.0	--	--	--	--	.6
Polish	--	--	.8	--	--	--	.2
Scandinavian	--	--	.4	.2	--	--	.2
Spanish-American	--	--	5.0	1.4	--	1.3	1.8
Other White	80.1	87.0	66.9	85.6	74.0	52.4	75.7
Does Not Apply	--	1.0	5.4	.4	16.0	39.6	9.4
Occupation							
Professional	12.9	52.0	20.2	21.5	18.0	18.1	22.3
Managerial	5.9	1.0	6.2	9.8	--	2.6	6.3
Clerical	2.0	5.0	4.5	4.9	--	2.2	3.9
Sales	1.0	2.0	.4	2.0	--	--	1.2
Crafts	2.0	--	4.5	2.4	--	7.9	3.6
Operatives	5.9	--	3.3	3.5	2.0	3.1	3.2
Service Workers	5.9	3.0	12.0	26.2	--	6.6	15.8
Private Househ.	9.9	2.0	5.0	.4	2.0	2.2	2.6
Farm/Mine Manag.	1.0	--	--	.2	--	.9	.3
Farm/Mine laborer	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Laborer	--	--	--	1.6	2.0	.9	.9
Lawbreakers	3.0	1.0	2.5	11.6	4.0	7.9	7.2
Unknown	50.5	24.0	41.3	15.9	72.0	47.6	32.7

Table 1, continued

Program Role	Family Drama (n=101)	Medical Drama (n=100)	Situation Comedy (n=242)	Action Crime (n=492)	Saturday Non-Cartoon (n=50)	Saturday Cartoon (n=227)	Total (n=1212)
	PROGRAM TYPE						
Role							
Regular	50.5	37.0	66.1	21.7	66.0	49.3	41.2
Guest	49.5	63.0	33.9	78.0	34.0	50.7	59.8
Cannot be Coded	--	--	--	.2	--	--	.1
Importance							
Major	33.7	17.0	41.3	19.9	62.0	41.1	31.4
Medium	17.8	14.0	19.8	18.9	24.0	15.4	18.2
Minor	48.5	69.0	38.8	61.2	14.0	40.5	50.4
Humanity							
Human	100.0	100.0	100.0	99.8	82.0	61.2	91.9
Humanized	--	--	--	--	16.0	35.7	7.3
Non-humanized	--	--	--	.2	2.0	3.1	.7

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* One show was classified "Action/adventure, non crime:" "The Wonderful World of Disney" had two characters, an old man and a mountain lion. They were not included in the table.

Of all the characters, 92% were distinctly human in nature, with an additional 7% coded as an animal, plant or machine with anthropomorphic attributes. One percent of the characters were distinctly non-human.

Presentational and Content Types. The total set of television characters came from the following content types:

Family dramas	8.3%
Medical dramas	8.3%
Situation Comedies	20.0%
Action/Crime Shows	40.6%
Saturday Non-Cartoon Shows	4.1%
Saturday Cartoons	18.7%

This verified the pre-eminence of crime shows across the television spectrum, yielding nearly one-half of all speaking characters from all shows.

If one were to describe the typical television character in terms of this basic set of demographic characteristics, the most valid description would consist of the following: a white male in his late 30's born in the United States and with no apparent regional roots. This individual would be middle class and would appear in an action/crime show.

Gender Comparisons. Having verified the predominance of males among these television characters it remained important to determine whether the sexes were being differently portrayed in the background characteristics and program roles. This analysis provided the following results (see Table 2):

(1) Women were relegated to lower socio-economic status roles than

Table 2.: Selected Background Characteristics and Program Roles of Fictional Television Characters by Gender

	Gender		
	% Female	% Male	N
Socio-economic Status			
Lower	29.7	70.3	397
Middle	28.9	71.1	536
Upper	20.1	79.9	204
Ethnic Identification			
Black	27.1	72.9	107
White	28.8	71.2	917
Occupation[1]			
Professional	32.6	67.4	258
Managerial	6.6	93.4	76
Clerical	60.0	40.0	45
Sales	14.3	85.7	14
Crafts	6.5	93.5	31
Operatives	15.4	84.6	39
Service	7.9	92.1	190
Private Household	90.0	10.0	30
Farm Manager	--	100.0	4
Laborers	--	100.0	10
Lawbreakers	11.5	88.5	78
Unknown	41.3	58.7	223
Age			
1-12	13.8	86.2	123
13-19	37.6	62.4	85
20-34	41.0	59.0	339
35-49	22.2	77.8	418
50-64	13.6	86.4	191
65-85	21.4	78.6	42
Mean Age (years)	33.1	38.9	
Program Type			
Family	32.7	67.3	101
Medical Drama	39.0	61.0	100
Situation Comedy	36.0	64.0	242
Action/Crime	22.4	77.6	492
Saturday Non-cartoon	22.0	76.0	50
Saturday Cartoon[2]	15.9	77.5	227
Role			
Regular	29.1	70.9	495
Guest	24.4	75.6	702
Importance			
Major	24.5	75.5	372
Medium	32.6	67.4	218
Minor	25.3	74.7	608

1 Occupation Data based on characters age 19 and older.
2 6.6% Saturday Cartoon characters had no gender.

men. Of all those characters portrayed as lower socio-economic status, 30% were women and 70% were men. Of those presented in middle class roles, 29% were women and 71% were men. Of those portrayed in upper socio-economic roles, 20% were women.

(2) Males and females appear to the same extent in ethnicity. Twenty-seven percent of the blacks portrayed were women and 29% of the whites portrayed were women.

(3) On Saturday mornings, the world of television was predominantly male. Across all of the programs, more than three-fourths of all characters were male. In the cartoon programs, 5 out of every 6 human characters, or 83%, were male.

(4) Men and women were differentially distributed by program type. Women appeared primarily in home settings: Of those characters appearing in family drama or situation comedies, 35% were female. Women were even more predominant in medical dramas, where 39% of all characters were women. Men on television are most heavily represented in the action/crime programs where they constituted more than 77% of the characters.

(5) A typical female character was six years younger than the typical male character portrayed on television. The average age of all females was 33.1 years, and the average age of all males was 38.9 years.

(6) Although adult women had 33% of the professional occupations, they also held 60% of the clerical occupations, 90% of the private household occupations, and 41% of the "unknown" occupations. By contrast, they held only 7% of managerial and crafts occupations, and 8% of the service occupations.

(7) The proportion of men and women who had regular or guest roles

did not differ. Women appeared as often in regular roles on programs as they did in guest roles on programs.

(8) Men and women were not distributed differently in terms of major and minor role presentations. The same percentage of those with major roles and minor roles are women--25%. Women have a slightly higher proportion of medium roles (33%).

Social Class. Looking at social class differences in character portrayals, we found the following (see Table 3):

(1) Females were more heavily represented in the lower and middle class than were males, while males were more heavily represented in the upper class.

(2) Blacks were most heavily represented in the lower class (52%), while whites were most strongly represented in the middle class (48%).

(3) The relation between socio-economic status and occupation showed that clerical, operative, service, and laborer occupations had the smallest representation in the upper class, while professional and managerial occupations had the highest representations in the upper class. Clerical, crafts, service, and private household workers had the heaviest representation in the middle class.

(4) There was a strong difference between age and socio-economic status groups. Characters portrayed as lower SES or middle SES averaged 36 years of age, while those portrayed as upper socio-economic class averaged 42 years of age.

(5) Lower class portrayals appear primarily in action-crime shows, family dramas, and Saturday cartoons, while being largely excluded from

Table 3.: Selected Background Characteristics and Program Roles of Fictional Television Characters by Socioeconomic Status

	Socioeconomic Status			
	% Lower	% Middle	% Upper	N
Gender				
Female	37.0	49.8	13.1	311
Male	33.3	46.7	20.0	816
Ethnic Identity				
Black	51.9	39.6	8.5	106
White	32.2	47.8	19.9	903
Occupation[1]				
Professional	19.4	43.1	37.5	253
Managerial	25.0	42.1	32.9	76
Clerical	35.6	62.2	2.2	45
Sales	42.9	28.6	28.6	14
Crafts	35.5	51.6	12.9	31
Operatives	73.7	21.1	5.3	38
Service	32.1	61.6	6.3	190
Private Household	23.3	56.7	20.0	30
Farm Manager	50.0	25.0	25.0	4
Laborer	70.0	30.0	---	10
Lawbreaker	50.7	37.0	12.3	73
Unknown	35.3	48.6	16.1	218
Age				
1-12	44.4	48.6	6.9	72
13-19	48.2	44.7	7.1	85
20-34	32.8	55.8	11.3	335
35-49	33.4	44.7	21.8	409
50-64	24.7	43.7	31.6	190
65-85	50.0	35.0	15.0	40
Mean Age (years)	36.1	36.3	41.9	
Program Type				
Family Drama	46.3	40.6	12.9	101
Medical Drama	19.0	51.0	30.0	100
Situation Comedy[2]	30.2	53.3	13.6	242
Action/Crime	36.2	44.1	19.5	492
Saturday Non-cartoon[2]	18.0	36.0	16.0	50
Saturday Cartoon[2]	26.0	37.0	10.6	227
Role				
Regular	32.7	48.2	19.1	450
Guest	35.4	47.6	16.9	680

Table 3, continued.

	% Lower	% Middle	% Upper	N
Importance				
Major	29.6	48.1	22.3	341
Medium	36.2	43.8	20.0	210
Minor	36.2	49.0	14.8	583

[1]Occupation data computed on characters 19 years and older.
[2]SES could not be coded for some characters.

medical dramas. In family dramas, 46% of all characters were in the lower class; in crime shows, it was 36%; in situation comedies it was 30%, and in medical dramas, it was 19%. The reverse was true for upper socio-economic class presentations. At one extreme, 30% of all characters in medical dramas were upper class and at the other extreme, 3% of characters in family dramas were upper class.

(6) The distribution of regular and guest roles by class was not different.

(7) There was a strong relationship between socio-economic status and the importance of the role portrayal. Lower socio-economic characters were more usually portrayed as minor characters than as major characters; upper socio-economic status characters were more often portrayed in major roles than in minor roles.

Ethnicity. The distribution of characters coded as black and as white were examined for the same variables as those examined for gender. These were the major results (see Table 4):

(1) The proportion of women who were black was the same as the proportion of men who were black.

(2) Blacks were consistently portrayed in a lower socio-economic status role than whites. Among those of lower socio-economic status, 16% were black; of those in upper class roles, 5% were black.

(3) Blacks were under represented in higher occupations and over represented in lower occupations. Seven percent of professional and 6% of managerial occupations were held by blacks, while nearly one-quarter of private household, farm manager, and laborer occupations were held by blacks.

Table 4.: Selected Background Characteristics and Program Roles of Fictional Television Characters by Ethnic Identification

	Ethnic Identification		
	% Black	% White	N
Gender			
Female	9.9	90.1	293
Male	10.7	89.3	731
Socioeconomic Status			
Lower	15.9	84.1	346
Middle	8.9	91.1	474
Upper	4.8	95.2	189
Occupational*			
Professional	6.5	93.5	247
Managerial	5.6	94.4	72
Clerical	13.6	86.4	44
Sales	---	100.0	13
Crafts	---	100.0	24
Operatives	11.4	88.6	35
Service	12.4	87.6	178
Private Household	23.3	76.6	30
Farm Manager	25.0	75.0	4
Laborer	22.3	77.7	9
Lawbreaker	14.3	85.7	70
Unknown	6.9	93.1	188
Age			
1-12	13.2	86.8	38
13-19	23.5	76.5	81
20-34	12.5	87.5	305
35-49	8.6	91.4	382
50-64	3.9	96.1	179
65-85	12.2	87.8	41
Mean Age (years)	32.3	38.0	
Program Type			
Family Drama	7.1	92.8	98
Medical Drama	4.3	95.6	91
Situation Comedy	19.0	81.0	200
Action Crime	9.0	90.9	463
Saturday Non-Cartoon	2.6	97.3	38
Saturday Cartoon	11.1	88.8	134
Role			
Regular	13.5	86.5	407
Guest	8.4	91.6	618
Importance			
Major	13.2	86.8	304
Medium	13.0	87.0	184
Minor	8.0	92.0	538

*Occupation data are based on characters 19 years and older.

(4) Blacks were younger in average age than whites. Blacks averaged 32.3 years of age and whites 37.9 years.

(5) Blacks more often appeared in certain program types than others. Of the characters in situation comedies, 19% were black, whereas only 4% of the characters in medical shows were black. Nine percent of the characters in action/crime shows were black. An interesting contrast is in the Saturday shows: 11% were black in cartoons compared to less than 3% in non-cartoons.

(6) Blacks appeared proportionately less often as guests in these series. Among regular series characters, 14% were black; among guests, 8% were black.

(7) Blacks appeared in proportionately more major roles than in minor. Thirteen percent of all characters in major or intermediate roles were black, compared to 8% of all characters in minor roles.

Minority Analysis. The sub-analysis of minority blacks and Spanish Americans identified 101 blacks in 37 shows. Eighteen shows contained 1 black character, 6 shows contained 2 blacks, 3 shows contained 3 blacks, 2 shows contained 4 blacks, and there were 8 programs with 5 or more blacks. This final set included "Fat Albert" (n = 13), "Good Times" (n = 7), "Grady (n = 7), "Sanford and Son" (n = 6), "That's My Mama" (n = 6), "Cop and the Kid" (n = 5), "Joe Forrester" (n = 5), and "Movin' On" (n = 5). The first five of these centered on black families. In other words, on the five shows on TV in 1975-76 which featured black families, 48% of all speaking black characters appeared for the week analyzed. One other prominent black-centered show, "The Jeffersons,"

had four blacks in the sample week.

Fifteen of the 37 shows containing any blacks were action-crime shows and 13 were situation comedies.

This same analysis identified a total of 20 Spanish-American characters, performing in eight shows. Four shows contained one, two contained two, one had five, and one (Popi) had eight Spanish-American characters.

For each talking character, all verbal references to race were coded as well as the racial composition of the discussants. In general, race appeared to be a taboo or avoided topic. It was discussed by 16 of the blacks and one of the Spanish-Americans. Among the 16 blacks who discussed race, seven were discussing their own race. Eight of the interactions discussing race were only with other blacks. Race was not discussed often in mixed-race settings.

The language behavior of the minorities was examined. Among the blacks, 26% had some accent, and 19% used a 'black accent' of some kind. The remainder had British, or New York accents. Twelve of the Spanish-Americans had some kind of accent.

A second component of language examined was the use of slang among blacks. Twenty-seven percent used some slang; the re-occurring terms were "dig," "dude," and "jive." Another recurrent language behavior was the use of either a double negative structure and/or use of the word "ain't." The former is illustrated by statements such as "I don't know nothin'."

The only item of dress or appearance which differentiated blacks from others was the Afro hairstyle. No particular clothing differences were observable with any frequency. One race-related behavior of interest for

subsequent examination in terms of social learning was the occurrence of special hand shaking or hand clapping as a form of greeting between blacks (10 occurrences). Often this form of hand greeting was supplemented or accompanied by a verbal greeting that fell into the slang language coding, e.g., "dig."

The final special analysis dealt with the composition of scenes in which black characters had their talking parts. Each time a scene changed characters, by someone entering or someone leaving the scene, the number of other people in that context who were of either the same race as the minority person or of the majority race were counted. Typically each black character appeared in a context which included two other blacks and one white. Thus, when blacks were on television shows, they appeared primarily in a minority-dominated context but one in which race itself was seldom the issue being discussed.

DISCUSSION

The population of fictional people on television does not correspond to the population of real people. It never has nor need it do so. The population of fictional people in any mass medium is chosen more for its pecularities than its regularities. What is important is whether some sub-groups of people are identified with a rash of pecularities that might be considered pejorative. Do consistent presentations persist--in the face of claims that they do not, or in the face of protestations that they should not?

Some themes appear to be derivable from the present content analysis. Women continue to be an important minority in television fiction. There

are three men for every woman. When they do appear, women have less status, poorer jobs, but are even more characteristically in the home, rather than working. They are not often found in adventuresome situations, and are characteristically younger than their male counterparts.

This portrayal of women replicates what has been determined in earlier studies. All such studies have a common problem which should be noted. There should be no assumption that the sheer frequency corresponds to potency of impact. It must be determined whether children, for example, are more influenced by this overall visual mileau of the portrayal of women, in a typically subjugated fashion, or are more susceptible to some notable exceptions. For example, do regular viewers of "Police Woman," or "Charlie's Angels," or "Maude," develop distinctly different impressions of what women can do (may do?) than regular viewers of shows in which women are more stereotyped?

The portrayals of racial minorities continue to be especially interesting. Spanish-Americans do not exist with any regularity. During 1975-76, one show, "Popi," accounted for 40% of all the Spanish-Americans in the sample week analyzed. That show was quickly cancelled. Normally then, what one could see of fictional Spanish-Americans was limited to "Chico and the Man."

Black Americans, on the other hand, can be found in more substantial doses. But their sheer count appears to be misleading. Of all speaking characters, the black population on television is very nearly identical to its real-world presence. A few more than 100 blacks were identified in the sample week, from among approximately 1200 fictional characters.

However, nearly half the blacks were confined to half a dozen shows which strongly feature black family situations. Across the remaining 80 plus shows, it was possible to find perhaps one black in every two shows. Blacks have largely been segregated, they interact primarily with their own race, and do not talk about race. Further, they are of lower social class, and less often appear as guests in regular series.

How may one interpret the appearances of black people in television series? There are many blacks to be seen, but if you don't choose to watch them in shows in which there are whole families of blacks, you're unlikely to see them prominently in other shows. And by and large, they 'stick together' with 'their own kind.'

Clearly, these are mixed messages, whether it is women, or minorities, or the aged, who are in the messages. If you are an advocate for the industry, the data support certain contentions of more roles, larger roles, etc. If you are a critic of the industry, the data are equally supportive of describing the industry's approach to the problem as cavalier. That argument is not resolvable from these data, but the data do provide a systematic examination of television role portrayals in terms of these major demographic characteristics.

More critical to the context in which this study was conducted is whether child viewers perceive mixed messages, or any messages at all from these role portrayals. Are white children more accepting of real life blacks--as long as they cluster together? Are black children using some of the major black characters as their own role models, now that such characters are generally more available on television? Do young girls

model the general image of women defined in terms of relations to men across all of television or do they model the leadership qualities of someone like Pepper Anderson on "Police Woman?" Do the girls develop role expectations that suggest that the housewife is more acceptable than a career? Or does television teach young boys that they should expect young girls to grow up to be housewives and teachers and secretaries and nurses, rather than doctors, lawyers, and so on? Answers must come from direct observation and assessment of children's responses to their television diets.

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